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ABSTRACT

A concern among those scrutinizing postsecondary programs in educational administration is the relationship among the academic and theoretical components of the programs, field-based experiences, and future on-the-job success. This paper examines the efforts of an educational administration department at Valdosta State College, Valdosta, Georgia, to evaluate its program in terms of this relationship. The department's review began with a focus on how field-based experiences could be used to structure program sequence and content. The review expanded to an examination of educational purpose concerning constituent needs and educational reform pressures. Ongoing evaluation and restructuring of the field experiences have been based on student evaluations, as well as professional judgment and state mandates. This report recommends that, in addition, use of the following program assessment techniques would reveal gaps in course offerings that should be addressed. First, the course competency analysis matrix should be developed. Second, adopting a more formal evaluation mechanism would enable supervisors to assess the utility of field experiences in developing administrative personnel and providing in-school support. This feedback could assist faculty in determining the perceived validity of requirements and how these perceptions affect field experiences, course content, and program sequence. Finally, extended followup studies of graduates could provide predictive validity for many competencies considered to be important. These beginning efforts to answer school reform requirements may bridge the theory-practice gap. (CJH)

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Using Field-based Experiences as a Guide for Program Evaluation and Redesign

--Overview--

As the call for educational reform begins to strike hard at the postsecondary level, educational administration programs are beginning to feel intense pressure for responsiveness through program evaluation and redesign. These programs are being required to answer to the reform agenda for elementary and secondary schools in terms of the types of leadership skills, knowledge and abilities which are being emphasized. They are also being examined in terms of academic rigor which is being called into question in the recent higher education reform reports and commissions.

One of the components of concern among those scrutinizing educational programs is the relationship between the academic and theoretical components of these programs, field-based experiences and future on-the-job success. This paper examines the efforts of the Department of Educational Administration and Supervision at Valdosta State College to evaluate its programs in terms of this relationship. The Department began its program review with a focus on field-based experiences and how they could be used to structure program sequence and content. This review has been expanded to a general examination of educational purpose vis-a-vis constituent needs and reform pressures (e.g., certification changes) in order to strengthen the theory-practice relationship.

Using Field-Based Experiences as a Guide for Program Evaluation and Redesign

Introduction

"This theory material is pretty interesting, but I want to know what I have to do in the real world."

"You folks are too wrapped up in the rarified air of higher education. When are you going to come on out to where the action is?"

"Just tell me what I have to do to become certified!"

These comments probably reflect a great deal of the sentiments of many students in educational administration programs. Cries about the impracticality of theory, the isolation of professors, and the concern for credentialing seem to be legion, and probably will remain so.

And these complaints or concerns are not new, nor are they just confined to students. The current reform movement has led to the production of a wide range of reports addressing such areas as teacher education and administrator preparation. This call for reform has helped to intensify the pressure on administration preparation programs, with the heat being turned up not only by students, but also by professional organizations, unions, and the general public.

In response, many departments of educational administration and teacher training have intensifed their efforts in the areas of program and personnel evaluation. Additionally, innovative and extremely sound or well-researched programs and efforts to improve the training of educational administrators have predated the current calls for reform. The NASSP Assessment Center for Principals and the National Network of Principals' Centers are just two of these tremendously exciting efforts (see Murphy & Hallinger, 1987).

While these somewhat extensive and expensive programs can serve as indicators of a promising future for administrator education and training, there is much work to be done within educational administration programs. Examination and evaluation are critical not only in order to address the various points of concerns from both inside and outside of the academy, but also as an important activity necessary for self-renewal, self-reflection, and program growth.

One of the primary areas of concern among those scrutinizing educational programs is the relationship among the academic and theoretical components of these programs, the field-based experiences (i.e., internship, practicum), and on-the-job success. The purpose of this paper is to present the recent efforts of the Department of Educational Administration and Supervision at Valdosta State College to evaluate its programs in terms of this relationship. The Department of Educational Administration and Supervision serves a predominantly rural part of the state, with almost half of its courses being conducted at off-campus sites. The Department provides coursework and field experience in certification, masters and specialist programs.

Our evaluation efforts have been precipitated by a variety of factors, including faculty turnover, student evaluations, state requirements for administrator assessment and education, and the series of reform pressures common to all programs in education. This multidirectional push for change--while at times bothersome--has certainly led us to a critical and extensive re-examination of our effectiveness in providing important, relevant and substantial courses and experiences for future and practicing administrators. We have determined that the field-based experiences of our students would be a

good place to begin a review of all that we offer. This examination is being guided by the following questions:

1. Do the field experiences provide students with a sufficient variety of experiences which will allow them to test their own assumptions about administration and upon which to lay their formal course work?

2. Do the field experiences provide value-added support to the host sites?

3. Do these field experiences address the professional certification requirements which the student will be facing upon graduation?

Departmental Field Experience Courses

As presently structured, two field-based experiences exist in the curriculum for students in the Department. With the knowledge that almost all of these students are full-time employees such as classroom teachers, lead teachers, assistant principals, principals, and central office staff, a real challenge exists to provide them with meaningful field experiences that will allow them to grow professionally by obtaining the needed skills to assume leadership positions beyond their present level of employment. To meet this challenge two vehicles or courses involving on-the-job experiences have been instituted: 1) The Internship (EAS 799 - 5 quarter hours) and 2) The Practicum (EAS 798-898 - 10 quarter hours).

The Internship

The internship is designed for students who want to move into leadership positions at the school level, such as an assistant principalship for instruction or the principalship itself. Most of these students are classroom teachers who already hold a master's degree in a teaching field and who are seeking add-on certification in the area of educational leadership. During the last five academic years (1982-1988), the number of new students seeking a first master's degree in Educational Administration and Supervision has declined, while the number of new students with a master's degree in a

teaching area who are seeking add-on certification and the education specialist degree in our department has increased.

The internship is supervised by a full-time faculty member from the Department and by the student's immediate work supervisor, usually the principal. The internship experiences are designed to provide a broad overview of the various administrative functions, reponsibilities and tasks required of school administrators at all levels as assessed on the Georgia Teacher Certification Test (TCT) for Educational Leadership; however, special emphasis is placed upon the principalship.

A diagnostic/prescriptive approach is used to evaluate each student's professional background and to plan course objectives unique to individual needs. There are, however, certain student activities and assignments which are required as a foundation for each internship. These activities generally focus on conducting a job analysis of area principals, building-level needs assessments, budget reviews, and similar tasks. Also included is mandatory attendance at school board meetings in order to obtain a full understanding of the wide range of constituent groups involved in educational policy-making. Each student is required to obtain written approval of his/her supervisor for all internship activities and must keep a daily log of the activities completed.

During the quarter the supervising professor schedules two or three visits to the internship site and meets with the student and his/her immediate supervisor to ascertain progress in meeting the previously agreed upon course objectives. These visits are two to three hours in duration, with special focus on any difficulties or problems encountered by either party. The final site visit entails a project review and submission of the project products

(e.g., daily log of administrative activities participated in, position paper). The professor reviews and grades these materials primarily on the basis of how closely the student was able to adhere to course objectives, as well as grading for written communication, evidence of administrative promise, and general graduate work quality.

The internship as a overview of administrative and supervisory experiences is being shifted from the end of a student's program to the beginning to provide a broader foundation upon which to base the decision to enter educational administration. It also helps beginning students to identify courses which will provide skills and training in areas of interest and/or identified need.

The Practicum

The Practicum is designed as a two-course sequence for education specialist degree students, most of whom are practicing administrators. It is designed to provide students with on-the-job training in a school and/or central office setting. The focus is on applying administrative theory to field practice, including the use of problem-solving models. Each student has an individually planned field experience to include those activities which are essential to either administering a public school or assisting in a school system central office.

As with the internship, the practicum is supervised by a full-time faculty member and the student's immediate supervisor. In order to accommodate the needs of students who are practicing administrators and those who are not, students first complete a career self-assessment instrument (MyCAP - My Career Action Plan) (Wylie, Michael & Rowe, 1986). The responses on this instrument are used to plan individualized practicum experiences. For those students who are not practicing administrators, experiences are

generally designed to provide the opportunity to develop a broad range of administrative skills and knowledge through analysis of job descriptions and interviews with central office personnel, work experience in various administrative positions, and attendance at board meetings. Students who are practicing administrators or supervisors are required to pursue a major project directed toward the solution of a school or school system problem.

The practicum is a two-quarter, ten-hour field experience, and it is scheduled to be the first and last course taken in a student's educational specialist degree program. The first course, EAS 798 - Practicum, is intended to expose the students to any administrative experiences missed at the school building level and to introduce students to administration at the central office level. In addition, practicing administrators may begin a project that could be continued for the entire program and concluded during the final quarter of their program in EAS 898 - Advanced Practicum. This second half of the practicum is intended to be a capstone for the entire education specialist program.

The degree of overlap between the two types of field experience is essential in a situation in which scheduling, travel and staffing constraints often force program sequence considerations into academic blue-sky. Nonetheless, these two field experiences serve to coordinate a student's program planning and career development.

Tbe recent inclusion of a career self-assessment instrument (MyCAP) and the development of an entrance and capstone field experience has apparently been met with student approval. In the 1987 survey of program graduates, all of the 23 respondents who participated in the practicum and related seminars rated it as "good", "very good" or "excellent." Similarly, of the 16

respondents who participated in the internship program, 15 rated it as "good" to "excellent," and one rated it as "fair." What has emerged from this program survey is a sense that these field-based experiences are successful. Future evaluations might be altered to provide an item-by-item evaluation of the components of the field experience.

Field Experiences and Program Changes

The student self-assessment process used in these field courses is also currently undergoing significant change. The state of Georgia has mandated the development of an assessment process for administrators seeking initial certification; this assessment will be added to the requirements of subject area content testing (TCT) and program completion. This assessment mandate had led to the development of the Leadership Performance Assessment Instrument (LPAI), which is currently in a limited pilot phase. The LPAI requires that subjects develop a school improvement project to serve as the forum for the demonstration of eight broad competencies. These competencies are subdivided into a total of 34 indicators, each of which is further divided into several descriptors (State of Georgia, 1987).

Because program graduates seeking certification will soon be required to complete the LPAI, the student self-assessment activities in the field programs are being expanded to include these LPAI dimensions. It is the intent of this broadened assessment to expand the field experiences which will require demonstration of the LPAI competencies and practice of the the LPAI processes (e.g., shadowing, research, project development), where appropriate. Because of the extensive research base, piloting and validation of the LPAI, the self-assessment activites and the field experiences should provide not

only strong practice (and, thus, increased probability of success in the assessment process), but they should also increase the likelihood of administrative job success upon completion of these activities. Additionally, with the changing of the field activities to include practice in state certification requirements, these future field-based experiences should have significantly greater direction or guidance for students as they identify, analyze and execute their field projects.

The expanded self-assessment instrument will not be confined to the field project. The knowledge, skill, and experience components are being used as analysis factors for each of the courses offered by the Department. Each LPAI indicator, TCT leadership objective, and MyCAP component will be used as analytic factors for each course in order to determine whether an objective in the course addresses the component, what course activities support these objectives or address these components, and any suggestions for changes (see Figure 1).

Thus, not only will the field experiences reflect the current state requirements and good program design, but they also can be used as a source of validation of these analytic components through student evaluation or feedback. Simultaneously, inclusion of these components in the field experiences should help expose students to the wide-range of administrative requirements.

Conclusion

While the ongoing evaluation and restructuring of the field experiences based on student evaluations, professional judgment and state mandates have provided tremendous direction for the redesign efforts in our programs of study, much work needs to be done and many questions need to be answered.

Figure 1. Course Analysis Chart

Item Analysis Chart – Individual Course

EAS Course:_____ Analyst:_____ Date:_____

LPAI/TCT/MyCAP Item	Objective	Activity/Requirement	Comment
1. High Expectations (LPAI)			
2. Goal Setting (LPAI/MyCAP)			
3. Time-on-task (LPAI/TCT)			
4. Orderly Environment (LPAI/TCT/MyCAP)			
5. Use of Assessment Data (LPAI/TCT)			
6. Praise and Recognition (LPAI/TCT/MyCAP)			

It is highly possible that the application of the course/competency analysis matrix will reveal gaps in our course offerings. Assuming the validity of the analytic categories, then serious consideration needs to be given to the development of course(s) to address these gaps, where appropriate. As a result of designing this matrix, we have already developed one course to address the broad personnel evaluation requirements of new legislative requirements and assessment instruments; fortunately, this course also filled a void in our program.

The field experiences provide faculty members with valuable contact with practitioners, as well as demonstrating the resources and interests available to them. What remains to be developed is a more formal evaluation mechanism for the site supervisors to assess the utility of the field experiences in developing administrative personnel and in providing in-school support. This feedback could assist the faculty members in determining the perceived validity of the field experience requirements and how these perceptions might affect future field experiences, general course content and program sequence.

The field experience and its attendant assessment techniques used for program planning need to be examined not only in the short-run, but in the long-run, also. No efforts have been launched to trace program graduates over an extended period of time, possibly throughout their careers in education. This longitudinal data should provide rare and much-needed predictive validity for many of the competencies, skills and other criteria that many of us claim to be important.

Most serious of all, however, is the continued concern over the bridging of the practice-theory gap. What promises to be a tremendously valuable starting point for program redesign could prove to be the experiential tail wagging the academic dog. While this problem is certantly not new, it may be

an indication of a general climate of careerism and practicality, (which, in our field, may not be too unhealthy, should we be able to capitalize on it).

We have no delusions that our efforts to redesign our programs through an evaluation of our field study courses are necessarily unique, robust, or rigorous by any stretch of the imagination. The discussion provided here is an attempt to portray the efforts of a small educational administration department to address serious concerns within the confines of its own programs. We are trying--and we will continue to do so. And we would also like to hear what you are doing.

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